

THE TANDANTOTTAM BRONZES

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THE village of Tandantöttam, celebrated in the *Tirunattutokai* of Sundaramūrti—the last of the sixty-three Śaiva Nayanmars—is situated six miles east of Kumbakonam in the Tanjore District. From Kumbakonam it is reached up to Murukkaṅgudi a distance of approximately five miles by conveyance and the residue of one mile is done invariably by walk as the area is cut up by irrigation channels.

In the second half of the eighth century A.D., an *agrahara* was created to the west of the village of Tandantottam. This new *agrahara* was named Dayāmukhamangalam and was endowed as a *brahmadēya* ('a gift to Brahmans') to 308 brahmins who had studied the three Vedas and the Smṛtis. The donor of this gift was Dayāmukha *alias* Kumāra, the Treasurer or the *Kośādhyakṣa* of the Pallava Government, in the time of the king Nandivarman Pallavamalla. The above information together with all the other details relating to the grant of the village, is furnished by a copper-plate record dated in the 58th regnal year of Pallavamalla who was elected to the Pallava throne about the year 725 A.D. when he was hardly twelve years old.

In editing the subject-matter of the above copper-plate Mr. Krishna Śāstri observes:—"The existence of the plates was brought to the notice of the late Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya, M.A., by Mr. Narayanaswami Ayyar, Sub-Inspector of Police, Madras City. It is stated that they were found with many other idols, while digging a foundation in the premises of the Śiva temple in the village of Tandantottam, Kumbakonam Taluk of the Tanjore District, about one hundred years ago. No one knew what it is and how they happened to be there."

The contents of these copper-plates have been published and the plates themselves were deposited in the Madras Museum. But about the idols that were taken out along with the copper-plates, nothing is known ever since. And an

enquiry made on the spot in September 1934 revealed that they were lodged in the same Śiva temple from whose compound they were originally unearthed. The shrine is now known as the Naṭanapurīśvara temple and is attributed to one Nandiraja as its builder. About thirty-five idols were shown in a dark room; a few of them could be identified as those that were dug out. They bore unmistakable marks of corrosion and slight damages caused in the process of excavation. An attempt at identification of these few images follows:—

Vrisavāhanamūrti or Vrisabhārūdhāmūrti

This group consists of Śiva, Pārvati and the Bull. The height of Śiva is 42 inches; of Pārvati 34 inches, Bull 28 inches. The *Jatāmakuṭa* of Śiva, ornamented by the serpent and the crescent is *par-excellence*. The hands are adorned by *Sarpakaṅkanas*. Śiva has also ornaments on the neck, a *Yagnōpavītam* and an *Udarabandham*. Pārvati's ornamentations are equally praiseworthy. Her garment which covers only the lower part of the body is diaphanous and bears floral designs. The Bull looks magnificent with rows of bells tied like garland around its neck. This group of images may be compared with a similar group from Vedāraṇyam. But the Tandantōttam images are undoubtedly finer than the former ones.

Vinādhara

That aspect of Śiva where he is represented as a teacher is well known as Dakṣiṇāmūrti. The four forms of Dakṣiṇāmūrti are:—(1) Yoga-Dakṣiṇāmūrti (the teacher of *Yoga*), (2) Jnāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti (the teacher of *Jnāna*), (3) Vyākaraṇa-Dakṣiṇāmūrti (the teacher of *Vyākaraṇa*), (4) Vinādhara-Dakṣiṇāmūrti (*Vinā* holder).

The second group of images at Tandantōttam consists of Śiva and Pārvati placed on a single pedestal which is slightly damaged during excavation. Śiva represented here as *Vinādhara* may be compared with similar bronze images from Vaḍaraṅgam, as well as with those in the Madras Museum.

The height of Śiva is 30 inches and that of Pārvati



(1) Vṛṣavāhanamūrti (*front and rear view*)



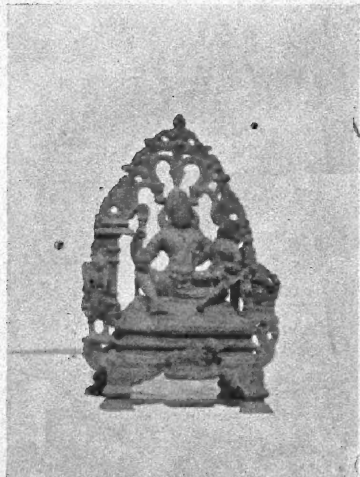
(2) Pārvati separated from the group No. 1
(*front and rear view*)



(3) Vinādhara with Pārvati (*front and rear view*)



(4) Candikeśvara and Tirunāvukkarasu
or Sundaramūrti



(5) Family group: Śiva,
Pārvati, etc.

22 inches. Many of the images of *Vinādhara* so far published have either three hands or four, but the Tandantōṭṭam bronze has only two, suggesting the early age of the image. The slender and graceful form of the image, the hooded cobra ornamenting the right shoulder and the artistic *Jatāmakuṭa* embellished with jewellery all round are characteristic of *Vinādhara*.

The absence of the *Vinā* noticed in some of the images of *Vinādhara* as in this particular case may be attributed to the fact that the *Vinā* which very often consisted of a thin *Danda* alone, was cast independent of the image and inserted into its hands only while decorating the image before procession. It is well known that bronze images come under the class of *Utsavamūrtis* which are deities meant to be taken out in gorgeous processions on festival days.

Candikeśvara

This great devotee of Śiva is enshrined both in the form of stone and bronze images in Śiva temples. Innumerable descriptions of Candēśānugrahamūrti are contained in the *Āgamas*. Many of the metal images of Candikēśvara so far photographed and published have four hands but the Tandantōṭṭam bronze has only two. It is stated that in the *Kaliyuga* sometimes Candīśa is represented with his palms in *añjali* with a string of flowers held in between and described as *Ādicandīśa*. The Tandantōṭṭam image represents this form and measures 30 inches in height.

Tirunāvukkarasu or Sundaramūrti

The practice of casting bronze images of canonised Nāyanmars and installing them in temples for purposes of worship was adopted in the early part of the Coḷa period. Appar or Tirunāvukkarasu, the contemporary Śaiva poet of the Pallava king Mahēndravarman I, occupies a prominent place among the Śiva *bhaktas* of the Tamil land. This image from Tandantōṭṭam may be compared well with other images of Appar published in works on South Indian Bronzes. But

the absence of the spade, the characteristic tool always associated with the image of Appar, is conspicuous, and therefore it may be that this statue represents Sundaramūrti rather than Appar. A similar bronze image of Sundaramūrti is enshrined in Padmanābhapuram (*H. I.*, Vol. II, Part II, Pl. CXXXVII). The height of the present image is 28 inches.

Śiva, Pārvati, etc.

An interesting family group consisting of Śiva, Pārvati, Gaṇeśa and Subrahmanya, all cast together, is one of the unearthed specimens of Tandantōttam. This group is iconographically very valuable. The height is 12 inches. Unfortunately, the faces of the figures are more corroded than of the rest.

Dating of the Images

In any attempt made at dating South Indian bronzes, the student is faced with several difficulties. Many of the images are gathered from treasure-troves and very often the circumstances of the find do not enable one to arrive at an approximate date.

With regard to the images found at Tandantottam, it may appear at the outset, that they are contemporaneous with the copper-plates, because both the images and the copper-plates were unearthed together from the same spot. This inference must be accepted with caution for the reason that the images might have been cast at a much later period and the copper-plates and the images thrown into the earth simultaneously at quite a different time.

Palæographical evidences or a comparative study of bronzes may sometimes indicate the age of the images. Firstly, none of the Tandantōttam bronzes bears any date or inscription. Secondly, the few metal images of the early Pallava period are hidden in the dark corners of our temples and have not been made available for purposes of study. Perhaps the Vēdanār image from Tiruvetkalam near Chidambaram is an exception. A comparative study therefore of the Tandantōttam images with early Pallava bronzes is not at

present possible until proper photographs of these early Pallava bronzes are available. But for the present, from a general study of the Tandantottam images in relation to published Cōḷa images, it may be tentatively maintained that the unearthed images described above belong to the early Cōḷa period rather than to the time of Pallavamalla.